WORLD BANK NEWS

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New Program To Wipe Out Riverblindness In Africa Launched At World Bank

The World Bank has announced a new joint international program to eliminate onchocerciasis as a major public health problem and an obstacle to growth on the African continent. The new program, unveiled at a conference at Bank headquarters December 4-5, will be carried out in 16 countries to wipe out the debilitating disease—commonly known as riverblindness—which causes unbearable itching, blindness, and disfigurement among an estimated 15 million citizens of these countries.

The African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) will be one of the largest inter-country health programs in the world and will be set up as a partnership among the Bank, governments, non-governmental organizations, donors, local communities and other international agencies. The 12-year program will be modeled on the highly successful Onchocerciasis Control Programme (OCP), established in 1974 and now on the verge of eliminating the disease affecting 32 million people in 11 West African countries.

Donor financing requirements for APOC will be about $124 million, to be shared by many of the same donor agencies that have been supporting OCP for the last two decades. These include the Bank and the World Health Organization, which is the executing agency, along with the United Nations Development Programme and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. Representatives of 16 donors have pledged an initial $20 million to get the program started.

"Over the next generation, APOC will add 10 million years of productive labor to the 16 African countries covered by the program. And, by way of OCP, we know that

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World Bank

Leading the blind in Burkina Faso. Soon to be history?

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World Bank To Assist Bosnia And Herzegovina With Reconstruction

The World Bank and the European Commission will sponsor a meeting with other donors in Brussels, December 20-21, to mobilize resources for post-war reconstruction and economic normalization in the republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the World Bank announced after the presidents of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia signed a peace agreement on November 21.

Total priority reconstruction financing needs for Bosnia are likely to be in the $4 billion to $5 billion range, according to a joint mission, led by the World Bank, that visited Bosnia earlier this month. The mission identified $3.7 billion in urgent reconstruction needs in the portion of the country controlled by the Bosnian-Croat Federation. A separate assessment will have to be done for the Serb Republic within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The joint mission—which included the International Monetary Fund, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Union and United States Agency for International Development—identified the sums to be committed in the near future but noted that projects will take some time to be fully implemented and disbursements would occur over the next three to four years.

In a letter sent to Alija Izetbegovic during the peace talks in Dayton, Ohio, World Bank President James Wolfensohn assured the president of Bosnia and Herzegovina that the Bank will continue and expand its efforts to assess the republic's financial needs, "with the sense of urgency it deserves."

The Bank will work with shareholders and the donor community to develop speedy and creative financing plans, Wolfensohn said. "These efforts will help the international community mobilize resources for economic reconstruction as well as for financial normalization."

Bosnia and Herzegovina's reconstruction needs are massive, but given the industry and infrastructure that existed before the war and its educated work force, the prospects for economic rebirth are positive, "provided peace takes hold," commented Kemal Dervis, the Bank's department director for the group of countries that includes the former Yugoslav Republics.

The December donors' meeting will also discuss the impact of the peace implementation process on reconstruction, political conditionalities, the role of humanitarian aid in the transition to recovery and strategies for achieving financial normalization with the outside world, including issues related to debt.

The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina applied for membership in the World Bank on April 20, 1992. Since then, war and

See **RECONSTRUCTION** *page 5*

Donors Pledge $2.3 Billion to Viet Nam

At a meeting in Paris November 29-30, donors made total pledges of $2.3 billion to Viet Nam for the next 12 months, but they also urged the government to accelerate the pace of reforms and warned that domestic savings need to expand further in order to promote public investment and private sector development.

Ruth Massey/UNDP

Private sector booming under *doi moi*.

Participants at the meeting, chaired by the World Bank, congratulated Viet Nam for its strong economic performance since introducing reforms in 1989, and especially in the last year, when the economy grew 9.5 percent, exports 30 percent and direct foreign investments rose to 7 percent over GDP.

Donors cited Viet Nam as an outstanding example of a country where economic reforms have engendered a "powerful, visible and positive effect" on people's lives and endorsed the broad development objectives presented by the government. They praised its achievements in promoting rural and social development and noted that poverty levels have dropped by one-third in the past decade.

"Viet Nam will continue to pursue the process of *doi moi* (renovation), taking advantage of favorable conditions to realize rapidly our objectives of achieving greater prosperity for our people, a strong nation and a fair and civilized society," Vietnamese Planning and Investment Minister Do Quoc Sam told the meeting.

Donors agreed that Viet Nam needs to move more aggressively to reform state owned enterprises and provide a level playing field for the private sector, especially small- and medium-sized industries. □

☎ For more information, *call Graham Barrett at (202) 458-0344, fax (202) 522-3405.*

'Elements Are in Place To Eventually Eliminate This Tragic Plague'

RIVERBLINDNESS, *from page 1*

the tools exist and the international collaboration can be garnered to fully control the disease and achieve results," said World Bank President James D. Wolfensohn.

WHO estimates that 15 million people are infected and nearly 100 million are at risk in the 16 countries to be covered by APOC. The program will control the disease by establishing community-based distribution systems for ivermectin, a drug that kills the infant worm in infected individuals.

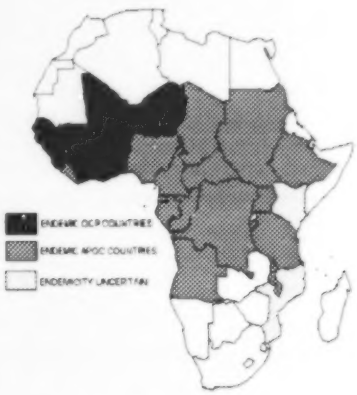
Ivermectin, or Mectizan®, is being provided free of charge by its discoverer, Merck & Co. Inc., which announced in 1987 that it would donate the product to approved riverblindness programs, "for as long as needed to as many as need it." The company's contribution to the new program is valued at $250 million.

"All the elements are in place for eventually eliminating this tragic plague from the remainder of the continent," Bruce Benton, head of the Bank's Onchocerciasis Unit, said at the conference. "What is required now is for the international community to move forward expeditiously and with the resolve that has been the trademark of OCP for the past two decades to launch and implement this new program."

Experience with OCP has shown that communities can effectively take responsibility for their own treatment. Moreover, Benton said, "the development of community-based ivermectin delivery systems provides an ideal entry point for other community-based health interventions and strengthens primary health care in Africa, especially in the poorest and most underserved rural communities."

Riverblindness—called Lion's Stare in the local languages of West Africa because it renders the eyes opaque and lifeless—is caused by millions of microscopic parasitic worms which live and reproduce in the human body for up to 14 years. They migrate through the skin, causing maddening itching, disfigurement and eye lesions that eventually lead to blindness. The disease is transmitted by a blackfly.

Vector control consists of aerial spraying, using environmentally-safe insecticides, blackfly breeding sites in rivers. After transmission has been interrupted for 12 consecutive years, the adult worms die out in the human population, thereby eliminating the source of the disease. APOC's control strategy will focus primarily on ivermectin distribution, since many of the program's targeted areas are in dense forests, which are not technically suited to vector control.



The Bank was instrumental in creating OCP and is the program's second-largest donor. OCP currently protects 32 million people from riverblindness infection at a cost of 75 cents per person, per year. The program has freed up some 25 million hectares of arable land, which had been previously deserted by people fleeing the disease.

Among the participants at the conference was former US President Jimmy Carter, whose nonprofit Carter Center houses the committees that approve the supply of ivermectin and oversee its distribution. □

☎ For more information, *call Eric Chinje at (202) 473-4467, fax (202) 473-7917.*

Bank, Japanese Researchers Seek New Collaboration

Development experts from the World Bank and Japan will meet in Tokyo December 11-13 at the first World Bank-Japan Research Fair, an innovative effort to expand collaboration between Japan, the world's largest aid donor, and the Bank, the world's largest multilateral development organization.

Unlike traditional research conferences, where experts present papers on specific and narrow topics, the Research Fair will encourage discussion among researchers with a wide variety of interests and backgrounds. Instead of sitting and listening to prepared speeches, about 60 World Bank and Japanese researchers will simultaneously present their work using multimedia tools.

The fair will be open to the general public December 12, when interpreters will be available to visitors wishing to view the displays and meet researchers. One goal is to make new knowledge about pressing global problems available to Japanese from many walks of life.

The theme of the fair is: "Toward a new partnership, seeking balanced development that protects the environment and improves people's lives." Presentations will range from new techniques for fighting water pollution and deforestation, to economic strategies for Vietnam, to the roles of stock markets and special economic zones in promoting economic growth.

Besides posters and computer graphics displays, the fair will also feature a welcome booth with a short briefing about the evolving partnership between Japan and the World Bank, and a regional issues booth with 10-minute mini-lectures about Asia, Africa and Central Europe, illustrated with computer graphics. In addition, fair visitors will be invited to use the Internet to explore the World Bank's Web site.

About 25 development experts from World Bank headquarters in Washington will participate and hold detailed discussions with their Japanese counterparts during follow-up workshops December 13. □

AIDS On The Rise In Asia, World Bank Warns

The AIDS epidemic is spreading to Asia, where it could wreak even more serious damage than it has over the last decade in Africa, World Bank experts recently warned.

"The center of gravity of the infection is shifting from Africa to Asia," said senior World Bank health adviser Dr. Richard Feachem in an assessment of the global outlook to mark *World AIDS Day*, December 1. "The greatest epidemics of HIV and AIDS that the world faces are those that will certainly occur in the most populous countries: China, India and Indonesia. These epidemics, still in their early stages, will dwarf the epidemics from which Africa has suffered for the past decade."

Barring an unexpected breakthrough in medical research, Asia can expect half a million new AIDS cases a year by the year 2000, according to estimates by the World Health Organization and UNAIDS*. Current AIDS/HIV infections across Asia are concentrated in India, Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand. Cambodia is especially vulnerable, with infection rates outstripping those of Africa. Across Asia, the epidemic has become well established where high-risk behavior related to intravenous drug use and prostitution are prevalent.

"Many of the harsh lessons learned in Africa have still to be learned in Asia, despite the fact that Asia is experiencing the epidemic about a decade later," says Dr. Michael Porter, of the Bank's Asia Technical Department. "The expected human and economic costs to Asian society are barely recognized by many people." With 60 percent of the world's population, Asia will soon dominate the HIV picture in terms of total numbers infected.

"Many of the harsh lessons learned in Africa have still to be learned in Asia, despite the fact that Asia is experiencing the epidemic about a decade later."

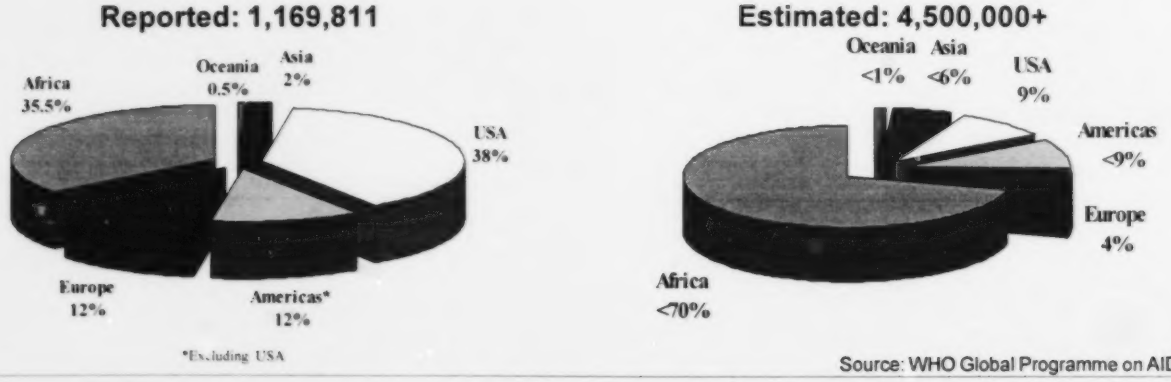
But both large and small countries in Asia have the opportunity to take effective action now and avoid facing a crisis in the near future. "The best time to spend a dollar on HIV control is when you've got no HIV in your country," says Feachem. "The cost-effectiveness of control declines markedly as prevalence rises. Countries as yet little affected should be investing heavily."

The potential consequences of inaction on the economies of developing countries should not be overlooked, according to David de Ferranti, Director of the Bank's Human Development Department: "HIV/AIDS is a developmental priority which, if not tackled aggressively in its early stages, results in devastating consequences, as we're already seen in Africa."

The lessons learned by African countries in their struggle against AIDS could be very useful to Asian countries. For instance, research in Tanzania has shown that low-cost investments in the treatment of sexually transmitted disease (STD) also decrease HIV transmission rates by over 40 percent. These results confirm that STD treatment must be a central part of all HIV control programs. "It's a win-win investment," says Debrework Zewdie, World Bank AIDS Coordinator. "It reduces the suffering and long-term consequences of

Continued on following page

Difference Between Reported and Estimated Total AIDS Cases Worldwide, by Region (1980-95)



Source: WHO Global Programme on AIDS

from previous page

STDs in women and men, and simultaneously has a large impact on HIV transmission–the best news we've had for quite a while."

Some bright spots are appearing in Asia. In Thailand, the government's awareness and prevention campaign has resulted in much greater use of condoms. STD rates have fallen considerably and the HIV prevalence rate among army recruits is now starting to decline. These changes may have been slow in coming, but they show what is achievable.

The Bank's warning of the pandemic's advance on Asia came against a global backdrop in which 13 million to 15 million adults were infected with HIV in 1994. An additional 6,000 people worldwide are infected each day. It is estimated that as many as 40 million people, more than five million of them children, will be HIV-positive by the end of the decade. Women are the fastest-growing group among new HIV victims, with 3,000 more infected each day.

The World Bank is the single largest source of external funding for HIV/AIDS prevention and control in the developing world. By 1996, the Bank will have invested about $700 million in more than 60 projects to help prevent and control HIV/AIDS and STD, with an estimated 23 percent of funding allocated to the Asia region. Sixty-four percent of lending for this cause is from the International Development Association, the Bank's concessional loan affiliate. The Bank is currently supporting six HIV/AIDS projects in Asia and expects this number to increase. □

* On January 1, 1996, UNAIDS will replace the World Health Organization's Global Programme on AIDS. Co-sponsors of UNAIDS are the World Bank, WHO, UN Development Programme, UN Population Fund, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UN Children's Fund.

☎ For more information, call Rebeca Robboy at (202) 473-0699, fax (202) 522-0321.

Bank Creates New Vice Presidency for United Nations Affairs

Stressing the importance of stronger ties with the United Nations, the World Bank recently announced the creation of a new vice presidency for United Nations Affairs, to be headed by Timothy Thahane. Effective January 1, 1996, Thahane will assume the responsibilities of the new office, created to coordinate and develop the Bank's relationship with the UN system, including the Secretariat, organs and specialized agencies (other than the IMF), programs and conferences.

"With his profound knowledge of the work of the World Bank Group and his broad understanding of the work of international organizations, Mr. Thahane is expected to strengthen and develop our partnership with the UN system," World Bank President James Wolfensohn said. He also acknowledged, "with admiration and gratitude, the immensurable contribution Mr. Thahane has made as secretary of the Group."

Timothy Thahane received his education at the Memorial University of Newfoundland and the University of Toronto. He has been vice president and secretary of the World Bank Group since April 1980. Before that date, he was ambassador of Lesotho to the United States (from 1978 to 1980), executive director in the World Bank Group (from November 1976 to October 1978) and alternate executive director (from November 1974 to October 1976).

Earlier on, Thahane held several posts in the government of Lesotho, including director of Planning and ambassador of Lesotho to the European Economic Community in Brussels.

Thahane will be replaced by Shengman Zhang, who will become vice president and secretary on January 1. Zhang has been executive director for China at the Bank since November 1994 and member of the Global Environmental Facility Council since October 1994. He served as alternate executive director from November 1992 to October 1994.

Zhang received his education at the Fudan University in Shanghai and McGill University in Montreal. After working as an economist at the Chinese Finance Ministry from 1981 to 1983, he was assistant to the executive director at the World Bank Group from 1983 to 1987. He then held a number of senior positions at the Chinese Finance Ministry, including those of adviser to the Finance minister and acting director of the World Bank Department in the Finance Ministry. He returned to the Bank as alternate executive director in 1992. □

RECONSTRUCTION, *from page 2*

problems relating to the debt of the former Yugoslav republics–Bosnia still owes the Bank close to $450 million and the IMF some $39 million–have delayed membership. Clearing these arrears and agreeing with bilateral donors on a strategy to handle existing obligations will have to be a part of the economic normalization process that would allow Bosnia to become a member of various international financial institutions.

Once membership and financial normalization are achieved, the World Bank Group hopes, very quickly, to provide new credits for reconstruction in support of sectoral development and policy reforms. The Bank plans to make a significant contribution to Bosnia's reconstruction in 1996 and will continue its efforts in the coming years, Bank officials said.

Any proposals for a normalization strategy and for loans or credits will have to be approved by the Bank's board of directors. The members of the so-called Contact Group are also major shareholders of the Bank and contribute to its soft-loan facility, the International Development Association. □

☎ For more information, *call Jan Pakulski at (202) 473-1797, fax (202) 522-2633.*

Date	Event	Sponsor	Location	Telephone
DECEMBER				
7-8	Philippines Consultative Group Meeting	World Bank	Tokyo	(813) 3201-4927
9	Ministerial Conference on Assistance to Palestinians	European Union	Paris	(202) 473-2318*
10	Seminar on Savings Behavior and Products	Epargne Sans Frontiere/ Centre National des Caisses d'Epargne et de Prevoyance	Paris	(331) 4800-9682
11-13	World Bank/Japan Research Fair	World Bank and Japanese Development Organizations	Tokyo	(202) 473-2318*
12	Malawi Consultative Group Meeting	World Bank	Paris	(331) 4800-9682
14-15	Zambia Consultative Group Meeting	World Bank	Paris	(331) 4800-9682
20-21	Meeting to discuss aid for Bosnia-Herzegovina	World Bank/European Commission	Brussels	(202) 473-1782*
26	Global Coalition on Africa	World Bank	Maastricht	(331) 4800-9682
JANUARY 1996				
17-18	Panel: "Privatization and Employment in the Context of Economic Reform"	Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development/Arab Monetary Fund	Abu Dhabi	(202) 473-2318*

Upcoming HIV/AIDS Meetings in Asia

- AIDS Policy Seminar in South Asia. Economic Development Institute (EDI). Colombo, Sri Lanka. February 6-9, 1996.
- International seminar on Population and AIDS for project managers, sponsored by the Japanese Foundation for Advanced Studies on International Development (FASID) and Management Sciences for Health (MSH, Boston). Bangkok, February 1996.
- 3rd International training course on HIV for Laboratory Technicians, sponsored by JFAP and the Japan national Institute of Health. Tokyo, February 1996.
- Planning for HIV and AIDS. Course sponsored by European Union and British Council. Jaipur, India. March 4-16, 1996.

Editor's Note: *Development Agenda* is a feature that alerts journalists to key news events in the field of economic development. Journalists should contact sponsoring agencies for details about each event. Asterisk (*) indicates telephone number is in the U.S.A. All other telephone numbers include country and city codes.

ARGENTINA The World Bank approved a $38.5 million loan on November 28 to help Argentina improve its international competitiveness. The loan will provide one-time, cost-sharing grants to small- and medium-sized private manufacturing and service businesses for product improvements and export development expenditures; increase their awareness of export opportunities; and improve the performance of export-sector public agencies. The project will be implemented by the Ministry of Economy and will be subject to a mid-term review.
For more information, call Aurora Losada at (202) 473-2460, fax (202) 522-3698.

BANGLADESH The International Development Association (IDA) on December 5 approved a credit of $121.9 million to prevent land erosion and improve river bank protection works along the Brahmaputra River in Bangladesh, protecting an estimated 2-3 million people living in an area of potential flood disaster. The project includes a program of resettlement for people displaced by project works, technical assistance for continued maintenance of protection works and institution building in favor of a national water management plan.
For more information, call Rebeca Robboy at (202) 473-0699, fax (202) 522-0321.

BOLIVIA IDA on November 30 approved two credits, totaling $14.1 million dollars, for two technical assistance projects for power sector and financial markets and pension reforms in Bolivia, to be implemented by the Ministry of Capitalization and other public financial institutions. A credit of $9 million will be used to set up the institutional and information systems needed for regulation and supervision of proposed pension and capitalization distribution systems; improve securities regulations and market information systems; establish transparent processes for the distribution of capitalized shares; and strengthen the Superintendency of Banks. The second credit of $5.1 million will boost the capitalization and privatization of utilities and help carry out studies in pricing, environmental assessment and sustainable energy development. It will also support institution-strengthening and restructuring of utilities.
For more information, call Aurora Losada at (202) 473-2460, fax (202) 522-3698.

COTE D'IVOIRE IDA on November 28 approved a $20 million credit for a rehabilitation project in Côte d'Ivoire that is part of the first cross-country operation in support of a railway to be operated by a private concessionaire in Sub-Saharan Africa. The project is part of a larger program that includes Burkina Faso to revitalize public transportation and to promote competitiveness and regional cooperation. The Ivorian railways will use the funds to pay a private company to carry out infrastructure repairs and maintenance along the Ivorian side of the Abidjan-Ouagadougou-Kaya railway.
For more information, call Eric Chinje at (202) 473-4467, fax (202) 473-7917.

GHANA IDA on December 5 approved a $23.9 million credit to promote the growth of an efficient, competitive and well regulated non-bank financial sector and an efficient system of payments in Ghana. The project will support legislative and regulatory reforms, organization-structuring, institution-building, technical, managerial and market development training, greater competition, divestiture of government shareholdings and market and product development. Beneficiaries include the stock exchange, the Securities Regulatory Commission, the central bank and the Finance Ministry.
For more information, call Eric Chinje at (202) 473-4467, fax (202) 473-7917.

GUINEA IDA approved a credit of $6.6 million on November 28 to help the government of Guinea reorganize the ministry and institutions of higher education; improve budgetary programming and monitoring; and upgrade the information and communications systems. The project is aimed at supporting the development and implementation of a new policy framework in Guinean higher education, and for institutional capacity-building in education.
For more information, call Eric Chinje at (202) 473-4467, fax (202) 473-7917.

LITHUANIA The World Bank approved a loan of $6.2 million on December 5 for a four-year project to reduce water pollution in the city of Siauliai, Lithuania. The project, costing an estimated $22.85 million and financed in part by Norway, Finland and Sweden, includes the rehabilitation of water and wastewater management systems, construction of a new water treatment facility, completion of an unfinished wastewater treatment plant and institutional strengthening and training.
For more information, call Jan Pakulski at (202) 473-1797, fax (202) 522-2633

MOZAMBIQUE IDA on December 30 approved a $98.7 million credit to Mozambique for a health care project aimed primarily at women and children living in rural areas. Carried out by the Health Ministry, the project will expand and improve the network of first-level health facilities and hospitals, increase laboratory facilities and provide a more stable supply of supplies and medications. It will also support a national maintenance strategy, a child and inpatient nutrition program and general provincial operations. The project includes human resource development and the strengthening of systems for information, management, supplies and support services.
For more information, call Eric Chinje at (202) 473-4467, fax (202) 473-7917.

PERU The World Bank approved a loan of $90 million on December 5 for a rural road rehabilitation and maintenance project in Peru. Total project cost is estimated at $250.3 million and includes rehabilitating about 7,500 km of roads (20 percent of the total rural road network) and another 2,200 km of connected primary and secondary roads; setting up a routine maintenance system; improving streets in small rural communities; and technical assistance to agencies, local governments and communities in formulating transport and management techniques, road planning and training.
For more information, call Aurora Losada at (202) 473-2460, fax (202) 522-3698.

POLAND The World Bank on November 28 approved a loan of $160 million to Poland for a project to modernize, rehabilitate and upgrade electric power transmission and to provide technical assistance to the power sector. The total project cost is estimated at 275.7 million and the Bank will finance only the direct foreign exchange costs for the project, which is part of a larger investment program to reinforce Poland's high voltage grid.
For more information, call Jan Pakulski at (202) 473-1797, fax (202) 522-2633.

RUSSIA The World Bank approved a loan of $24 million on December 30 to help Russia bring its product and manufacturing standards up to international levels. The project will support the creation of a standards inquiry point, as required by the World Trade Organization, and will help inspect, redraft and harmonize existing standards. The loan will also help finance the purchase of measuring and testing equipment, publicity efforts and certification and accreditation activity.
For more information, call Jan Pakulski at (202) 473-1797, fax (202) 522-2633.

WORLD BANK NEWS

Stefano Petrucci, Editor
Cynthia Delgadillo, Production Assistant

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